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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: EXPLORING ALL OPTIONS

Classified By: CDA Michael Gallagher, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a courtesy call with the Charge D'Affaires, MFA Director of Security Affairs Robert de Groot commented on the recent suicide attack in Uruzgan province and briefed on the state of play on the ISAF mission extension question. He commended the Dutch public for responding in a restrained fashion to the latest attack, and noted that the ministers most involved with the extension question will meet on July 12 to discuss the way forward. All options remain on the table, but de Groot hoped the GONL would get the "green light" to informally confer with SACEUR on how best to enlist Allied support to fill some key tasks, thereby allowing the Dutch to maintain the lead and reduce their presence in Uruzgan, and possibly look at other deployments like Africa. De Groot discussed these issues with the Charge D'Affaires on July 11. End summary.

Suicide Attack

¶2. (C) De Groot appreciated condolences expressed by the Charge D'Affaires regarding the July 10 attack in Deh Rawood which killed 17 civilians, including 12 children, and wounded 7 Dutch soldiers. De Groot said that four of the seven Dutch soldiers are stable, but two are in critical condition, and the last Dutch soldier is not expected to survive. He suggested, however, that the media and public response to the attack has been restrained -- "more so than our politicians," he said. "Our public has reached the point now where it will take more than crazy IED bombers to kick us out," de Groot averred. (Comment: Most Cabinet members spoke out strongly following the attack; the Dutch newspaper *Telegraaf* opined that the attack on Dutch soldiers proved the Dutch "have been doing good work." End comment.)

¶3. (C) De Groot could not fathom why the Taliban continue to target the Afghan people, and said the Dutch are finding that the Taliban are often preying on handicapped individuals, claiming they will "never make it to heaven" unless they opt to become suicide bombers. He added that the Dutch require more information and knowledge on IEDs -- while up until recently, the Dutch have been able to avoid a number of IED attacks. But in the past two weeks, the Dutch have experienced three such attacks, and it is clear the Dutch

need more help, especially in reference to intelligence, to avoid future IEDs. De Groot suggested the new IED coordination cell in Kandahar should provide the Dutch the intelligence they need.

Meeting of Six

¶ 14. (C) De Groot said the six ministers most involved with the Afghanistan extension question will meet tomorrow (July 12) to discuss the mandate or "ground rules" for a way forward. "The Six" -- PM Balkenende and Foreign Minister Verhagen from the Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), Deputy PM and Finance Minister Bos and Development Minister Koenders from the Labor Party (PvdA), and Deputy PM Minister for Youth and Family Affairs Rouvoet and Defense Minister van Middelkoop from the Christian Union -- will determine if the government is ready to start exploring options further partners at NATO to team with in Uruzgan. De Groot said he had "no clue" what the ministers will decide -- from the civil servant perspective, it was clear that the Dutch should extend. He speculated that the ministers also understood that extending was in the best interests of both the Netherlands and Afghanistan. But the decision is "much more difficult" for the politicians -- especially for the PvdA, who is in "bad shape" and a decision to support an extension would give the opposition ammunition against PvdA in the competition for the votes of a shared constituency.

All Options

¶ 15. (C) De Groot said that should "The Six" give the "green light," then FM Verhagen and DM van Middelkoop will informally meet with SACEUR to discuss options. De Groot said the most likely scenario for a Dutch extension involved a decrease of Dutch troops while maintaining the lead in Uruzgan. This presents an interesting dilemma: the Dutch goal is to expand their ink blot strategy of secure zones linked by reconstruction projects throughout the province, which will be more difficult if the Dutch decrease their military presence. The only answer is for other Allies to "step up" and contribute more, de Groot explained.

¶ 16. (C) He suggested the Dutch were looking at a number of options in which other Allies might contribute to the mission in Uruzgan. For example, while the Dutch would be reluctant to give up control of Apache helicopter support in Uruzgan, they would be "more than happy" to allow another Ally provide F-16 support for the province. "This could reduce the Dutch presence by 150 persons," explained de Groot. Other options include Allies taking over the Dutch field hospital (60-70 persons) or guards for the base in Tarin Kowt -- "perhaps the Georgians or Turks" could provide the guards, de Groot suggested.

¶ 17. (C) De Groot acknowledged that the cost of an extension remains a large obstacle, and noted that the Dutch are short 250 million euros for each of the last two years of the current mission. But thus far, civil servants have convinced the ministers involved to focus on "the substance first and cost later." De Groot added that there is increasing pressure in Parliament for the Dutch to make a meaningful military contribution in Africa. By decreasing the size of the mission and enlisting other Allies to take on some of the tasks in Uruzgan, and deploying in some fashion to Africa, de Groot suggested that all concerned might be satisfied.